

**LEADERSHIP TRAINING:  
A MUST FOR CHIEF OFFICERS IN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS  
IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY, NEW YORK**

**EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The problem was that traditional technical training for firefighters in Westchester County, New York is insufficient to prepare them to assume Chief Officer roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service.

The purpose of this applied research paper was to identify and evaluate current leadership skills and traits that volunteer fire departments in Westchester County must instill in their members in order to cultivate 21<sup>st</sup> century Chief Officer leadership. Identifying required leadership skills for Chief Officers, examining how surrounding volunteer fire and not-for-profit organizations develop their future leaders and determining how Westchester County firefighters view and understand leadership skills and the need for their Chief Officers to possess them did accomplish the purpose of this Applied Research Paper. Descriptive and evaluative research methods were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the skills and traits that members of academia, as well as experts in the fire service, describe as necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession?
2. Do other nationally recognized volunteer organizations provide leadership training to their members?
3. Do volunteer fire departments in counties surrounding Westchester County view leadership skills and training as valuable tools and are they required in order to assume Chief Officer positions within their organizations?
4. Do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County understand the difference between management and leadership skills required for today's Chief Officers?

5. How do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County view their current Chief Officers and feel about leadership skills and training as necessary tools to prepare them to assume future Chief Officer positions within their organization?

The procedures used to complete this Applied Research Project were addressed through a two-pronged approach. First, extensive literature research was conducted. This research was intended to determine the skills that members of academia, as well as experts in the fire service, describe as necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession. Next, the second prong in this research approach was conducted. This approach involved the development and distribution of two surveys to answer research questions two through five. These procedures were designed to address the problem statement of this Applied Research Project.

The results of this research described the required skills and traits that members of academia, as well as experts in the fire service, felt necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession. These results also identified the level of knowledge current volunteers firefighters in Westchester County possess regarding leadership requirements, whether other volunteer organizations, both within and outside the fire service, provide Leadership training and should leadership training be required of volunteer Chief Officers.

Recommendations were made to immediately implement a requirement to make leadership training mandatory for all current and future Chief Officers in Westchester County. It was further recommended that this be a graduated implementation program so no department is unduly affected and time is provided for all who desire to attend this training can to do so.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX A (Leadership Survey) .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX B (Regional County Leadership Survey) .....</b>	<b>36</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The problem is that traditional technical training for firefighters in Westchester County, New York is insufficient to prepare them to assume Chief Officer roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service.

The purpose of this applied research paper is to identify and evaluate current leadership skills and traits that volunteer fire departments in Westchester County must instill in their members in order to cultivate 21<sup>st</sup> century Chief Officer leadership. Identifying required leadership skills for Chief Officers, examining how surrounding volunteer fire and not-for-profit organizations develop their future leaders and determining how Westchester County firefighters view and understand leadership skills and the need for their Chief Officers to possess them will accomplish the purpose of this Applied Research Paper. Descriptive and evaluative research methods will be utilized to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the skills and traits that members of academia, as well as experts in the fire service, describe as necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession?
2. Do other nationally recognized volunteer organizations provide leadership training to their members?
3. Do volunteer fire departments in counties surrounding Westchester County view leadership skills and training as valuable tools and are they required in order to assume Chief Officer positions within their organizations?
4. Do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County understand the difference between management and leadership skills required for today's Chief Officers?

5. How do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County view their current Chief Officers and feel about leadership skills and training as necessary tools to prepare them to assume future Chief Officer positions within their organization?

### **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Westchester County New York is one of sixty-two counties in the state. New York City and the Long Island Sound share its southern border, Connecticut its eastern border, the Hudson River is the border to the west and Putnam County is the neighbor to the north. Westchester County has 450 square miles of landmass with a population of 924,000 according to the 2000 census (Westchester, 2001).

The fire service in Westchester County is comprised of 58 independent fire departments responsible for providing fire and emergency services protection to their citizens. The makeup of these independent fire departments are as follows; 4 all career (paid) departments, 14 combination paid and volunteer departments and 40 all volunteer departments. All career and some of the combination departments are administered by paid Chief Officers who must meet minimal training and educational requirements in order to assume leadership roles within their departments through various testing methods for promotion. The remainders of the volunteer and or combination departments are lead by Chief Officers who are elected to one or two year terms. There are no countywide standard requirements, especially in the area of leadership training, which members must meet to run for and be elected to Chief Officer positions within their volunteer fire department. Various volunteer departments have some form of training and experience requirements while others are less demanding of members seeking leadership and Chief Officer positions.

New York is a “home rule” state meaning that each of the 43 municipalities are responsible to provide public services, including fire protection, to the citizen’s within their jurisdiction. The “County” has no responsibility for or authority in setting standards for Chief Officer positions within local volunteer fire departments. The Westchester County Department of Emergency Services Training Division however is responsible to provide fire service related training ranging from Basic through Advanced firefighter courses under New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) guidance. This division also provides numerous county designed specialty courses aimed at preparing the firefighter and officer to assume their roles within their organization which includes *Introduction to Fire Officer* and *Leadership in the Fire Service* (Westchester, 2003). These courses are very popular but are not a requirement in any department within Westchester County for firefighters or Chief Officers in preparation for leadership roles.

The lack of a standardized set of leadership training requirements needed to assume Chief Officer positions within volunteer fire departments in Westchester County is the reason many Chief Officers are not prepared to assume the leadership role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service. Most, if not all Chief Officer candidates are prepared from a firefighter, hands-on perspective but lack the skills and vision necessary to address new administrative problems in the management of their respective departments. Requiring formal leadership training prior to assuming a Chief Officer position better prepares the candidate to assume his or her leadership role within the organization.

The significance of this study to the volunteer fire departments in Westchester County is threefold. First, the study will identify the basic skills and traits that are widely accepted as necessary for leaders to possess both within and outside the fire service. Next, the use of

leadership programs used by other volunteer organizations to prepare future leaders to assume their place in the organization will be identified. Finally, the study will identify the depth of knowledge volunteer firefighters and officers in Westchester possess in understanding the differences in the skills and abilities that are generally identified as those possessed by managers vs. leaders. This study will also point out how these volunteers perceive their current officers and if they believe formal leadership skills and training should be a requirement for Chief Officers in volunteer departments in Westchester County.

This Applied Research Project is the starting point for future research on requiring formal leadership training in the fire service throughout the country. While this research focuses on the volunteer fire service in Westchester County New York it can and should be expanded to include all volunteer and career/paid departments nationwide. Departments throughout the country can use this study as a basis for designing leadership programs specific to their organizations. Future studies should also explore the volunteer organizations that are identified as requiring leadership training and how these established programs of leadership are or are not helping to develop future volunteer leaders and what can be done to support or enhance this training. Today's fire service leaders are challenged in ways Chief Officers never dreamed of as little as 30 years ago and the future promises to be more challenging as the events of the world unfold. Understanding and studying ways to prepare our current and future fire service leaders, just as the military and private industry prepare theirs, provides many areas of research that can build upon this initial study.

Research completed in this paper directly relates to the course material covered in the Executive Leadership course of the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) at the National Fire Academy. The Applied Research Project is written to complete the research component of the



Executive Leadership course. The goal of the Executive Leadership course, “The chief fire executive will develop the ability to conceptualize and employ the key processes used by effective executive-level managers” is the essence of leadership (FEMA, 2003). Throughout all 15 units of this program the course objective previously stated is developed and leadership skills required of today’s Chief Officers are examined. Influencing, networking, negotiating, persuading, planning and the art of storytelling, as each apply to leaders, are some of the topics discussed and seen throughout the entire course of study (FEMA, 2003). All of these skills are presented and reinforced through numerous role playing exercises, group discussions and independent reading assignments. The knowledge gained throughout this two week program, along with independent research and the results of the two surveys, makes up the bulk of the information presented in the findings of the Applied Research Project.

Research undertaken in this paper has a direct relationship in assisting the United States Fire Administration reach its 5-year Operational Objectives. Effective leadership within the volunteer fire service can have a positive impact on the goal of reducing the loss of life of firefighters by 25%. Leaders inspire their members to strive to do the right thing and be prepared for the unexpected through leading by example. Leading firefighters in this uncertain time by being prepared to assume the role as leaders in Homeland Security enables the fire service to appropriately respond in a timely manner to emergent issues such as domestic terrorism, another one of its 5-year Operational Objectives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of various literary sources including magazine articles, professional journals, books and the Internet is conducted along with two surveys. These sources are the basis for answering the following research questions: (a) what are the skills and traits that members of

academia, as well as experts in the fire service, describe as necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession, (b) do other nationally recognized volunteer organizations provide leadership training to their members, (c) do volunteer fire departments in counties surrounding Westchester County view leadership skills and training as valuable tools and are they required in order to assume Chief Officer positions within their organizations, (d) do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County understand the difference between management and leadership skills required for today's Chief Officers, (e) how do volunteer firefighters in Westchester County view their current Chief Officers and feel about leadership skills and training as necessary tools to prepare them to assume future Chief Officer positions within their organization.

Through the literature review and results of the two surveys these research questions are addressed.

### **Skills and Traits Necessary to Assume Leadership Positions**

President Harry S. Truman once said, "Leadership is the ability to get other people to do what they don't want, and like it" (Smith, 1997, p. 77). Leadership is a complex amalgamation of qualities that makes a person powerful enough to cause the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts (Staley, 1999). If you want to become a truly effective leader you must proactively work to arm yourself with the weapons of modern leadership (Carter, 2003).

Today's business environment requires a whole new set of leadership characteristics, referred to as "Leadership Beatitudes" by G.P. Smith (1997). According to Smith a leader must be bold and challenge the status quo, authentic and approachable, a role model able to "walk the walk" while he is out and about with the troops for this is where all the great ideas are found. Smith (1997) goes on to say that a leader in today's business environment must most of all be a

risk taker. Leaders are out in front showing the way not safely taking up the rear pushing where the traditional manager is found.

There is a common myth widely held that leaders are born. However, there is no such thing as a born leader. Leadership can't be taught but it can be learned (Staley, 1999). This fact is supported in a book by Harvard Professor John Kotter (1996) entitled Leading Change where he states that leadership potential is not developed overnight but in fact these complex set of skills evolve over decades of learning and observing other leaders. Professor Kotter refers to this concept as "Lifelong Learning".

The author Esther Wachs once wrote, "The next generation of Leaders will be those who can build a vision based on awareness of economic transformation, then help their partners and staff fulfill that vision. Leaders have to draw on a wide range of skills to get to the top and stay there" (Wynn, 2001, p. 19). The following are some of the basic skills that contribute to the kind of leadership described above (Grubbs, 1999):

- A leader must have a vision and must be able to communicate this vision to everyone in the organization
- A leader must build trust by remaining consistent, persistent and dependable
- A leader must have a positive self-regard and personal sense of growth

In addition to these skills, Gregory P. Smith (1997) lists a number of additional skills needed for today's leaders. Leaders must not only build a trust in themselves, as previously stated, but must trust their employees to do the right thing, they must be experts in their chosen field, keep their heads in the time of a crisis, be teachers and mentors to those they command and know what is essential to the task at hand and the success of the organization. Finally, a leader must be a good listener. "The absolute best leader is the one with the talent for listening. They

search out people and talk to them to learn what makes them click”, states Dr. Harry Carter (2003, p. 128).

In addition to the skills mentioned there are numerous qualities or traits that are regarded as necessary for today’s leaders (Honaman, 2003). The following is a list of these qualities that Mr. Honaman refers to:

- *Courage* – the guts to make the unpopular necessary decisions
- *Passion* – the relentless pursuit of quality
- *Creativity* – the ability to develop ideas

Along with these qualities or traits George Manning and Kent Curtis (1988) identify others that must be possessed by leaders in today’s organizations:

- *Ability* – this refers to the knowledge one has to perform the job
- *Charisma and Enthusiasm* – persuasiveness that causes others to become interested and follow
- *Stability* – the ability to understand ones own world and know how it relates to others
- *Self-confidence* – the inner strength to overcome difficult times
- *Vitality* – physical and emotional strength needed to exert leadership
- *Concern* – sincere desire to protect the welfare of subordinates

In looking at volunteer programs in general, and relating these programs to volunteer fire organizations, there are a number of elements of leadership that occur in all organizations. These elements are the responsibility of the organizations leaders and are what define the organization (MacLeod, 1993). These elements are:

- *Initiating action* – defining tasks, analyzing organizational needs, accurately reading the interests, skill and abilities of the volunteers

- *Managing change* – putting planning decisions into action while being aware of the impact on the organization and the volunteers
- *Team building* – promoting shared vision, innovation, creativity, initiative and trust
- *Decision making* – collecting pertinent information, involve the right people, chose an action path and guide decisions where necessary
- *Problem solving* – working with volunteers to resolve issues
- *Planning* – setting the direction and step-by-step procedures necessary
- *Supervising* – having responsibility for working together in a relationship
- *Delegating* – sharing authority and responsibility with others
- *Motivating* – encouraging the continued involvement and commitment of others

Typically leaders look at and become familiar with trends that surround them then adjust the organization to these trends. They have a sense of purpose, a clear mission and can make others see this mission and the organizations vision. Leaders establish values which guide the behavior of the organization. They create systems which allow people to move toward the successful realization of the organizations mission and goals. Finally, they motivate others around them to help the organization be all it can be (Vineyard & McCurley, 2001).

In a recent national poll of EMS workers studying at the National Fire Academy, four of the most desired leadership traits for today's leaders were identified (Dyar, 2000). These traits are:

- *Honesty* – trust produces dramatic following from subordinates
- *Consistency* – responsible behavior and predictable management habits from supervisors

- *Vision* – leaders ability to express what parameters the work team will pursue to achieve the mission
- *Competency* – knowledge, skills and abilities needed in different leadership roles

Bill Manning (1999, p. 4) states, in an article that appeared in Fire Engineering, “We (the fire service) still cling to the Old World belief that leadership is a birthright, that we ascend to positions of leadership and prominence through some genetic predisposition. We also cling to the erroneous belief that leadership comes with a title or rank”. However, a promotion and a badge do not make a leader (Manning, 1999). “Contrary to what some would like to believe, a helmet with a different color doesn’t automatically make someone competent. Competency must be developed”, states Richard Gasaway (2003, p.14), a 24-year veteran of the fire services. Chief Gasaway goes on to state, “oftentimes in the volunteer fire service, officers assume positions (through elections or appointments) they are not qualified to hold. Very few volunteer departments have a plan for officer succession or formal training programs for those who aspire to be officers”.

Finally, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani (2002) states throughout his book, Leadership that a true leader must first teach themselves if they wish to become successful. They must study, learn and read independently to enhance their knowledge of any and all subjects that are foreign or new. Leaders, according to Mayor Giuliani, must also study great past leaders and learn from their leadership. This, according to the former mayor, can be accomplished by acquiring a mentor, someone you look up to and see as an effective leader, and learn from them and prepare yourself to assume a leadership role in your organization when the opportunity presents itself.

All leaders are influenced by those they admire. Reading about them and studying their development inevitably allows an inspiring leader to grow his

own leadership traits. If he's/she's lucky, they will be able to learn from leaders in their own life-ask them questions, observe them in private, determine which of that leaders methods work well and would compliment their own burgeoning style. But as critical as it is to learn from others, much of a leader's approach must be formed from the raw material of his or her own life. (p. *xiv*)

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Limitations**

Anytime information is gathered using surveys the researcher is dependant on the honesty and cooperation of the sample survey group. While the group surveyed can be controlled to ensure that the survey is truly random, the researcher has no control over how those surveyed answer the survey questions. The assumption is made that those surveyed took the survey seriously and honestly answered the questions to the best of their ability.

Another limitation in this research project is the search for nationally recognized organizations on the Internet. While the researcher tried to explore as many organizations as possible obviously there are many that were not researched. The results of this search will be based on this limited search and may not truly reflect the whole population of volunteer organizations and their willingness to provide their members with leadership training opportunities.

### **Research Methodology**

The researcher, upon beginning the research for this project, first rechecked the problem statement for clarity and comprehensiveness. The problem, traditional technical training for firefighters in Westchester County, New York is insufficient to prepare them to assume Chief

Officer roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service, is found to be clearly stated. The problem is also found to be sufficient enough to allow for replication by other fire departments, both volunteer and paid, in determining if their members have the appropriate leadership training required of 21<sup>st</sup> century Chief Officers. This replication can be accomplished by examining their current officer training programs and comparing them with the recommendations in this study.

The purpose of this Applied Research Project is to identify current leadership skills and traits that volunteer fire departments in Westchester County must instill in their members in order to cultivate 21<sup>st</sup> century Chief Officer “Leadership”. The purpose of this Applied Research Project is addressed through a two-pronged approach. First, extensive literature research is conducted. This research is intended to determine the skills that members of academia, as well as experts in the fire service, describe as necessary for managers to possess in order to assume leadership positions within their profession. A second intent of this literary research is to determine if any non-fire related volunteer organization use formal leadership training programs to prepare their members for leadership roles within their organizations. This procedure is used to answer research questions 1 and 2.

The second prong in this research approach is that two surveys are developed and distributed. The first survey, seen in Appendix A, uses Part A & B to help determine a baseline of understanding volunteer firefighters in Westchester County have regarding the difference between the skills required of a leader and a manager; thus answering research question 4. This survey also addresses research question 5, using Part C, D & E of the survey, which explores how volunteer firefighters in Westchester County view their current Chief Officers. It also determines how volunteer firefighters feel about leadership skills and training as necessary tools to prepare them to assume future Chief Officer positions within their organization.



This survey was randomly distributed to volunteer firefighters and officers who attended various training classes at the Westchester County Emergency Services Training Center from February through March 2003. There are approximately 1500 “active” volunteers in Westchester County so this sample survey was randomly distributed to 300 volunteers in order to assure a 95% confidence level in the results.

The second survey, seen in Appendix B, is used to determine if volunteer fire departments in counties surrounding Westchester County view “Leadership” skills and training as valuable tools for Chief Officers. This second survey is also designed to elicit if the skills and training are required in these counties in order to assume Chief Officer positions within their organizations; research question 3. This second survey was distributed to all four surrounding counties that have volunteer fire departments so the results will show what is being done locally to address leadership training. Each county in New York has a Fire Coordinator who is the interface with New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control and responsible to coordinate training and all other fire activities within their respective counties. These coordinators are the ones who are knowledgeable of the requirement for individual departments in their jurisdiction and therefore were selected to answer the survey for their respective counties.

Once the literature research and surveys are completed for all research questions, priorities are set and objectives established to analyze the results of the applied research. Data is organized and documented in detail, analyzed and discussed in order to reach a final evaluative conclusion.

The fourth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association was used for this Applied Research Project as a reference.

## RESULTS

### Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. Throughout the literature review there are many skills and traits identified by both academia and fire service professionals that are felt to be required of today's leaders. Leaders must be bold and constantly challenge the status quo, authentic and approachable, a role model able to "walk the walk" while out in front of the troops and most of all be a risk taker (Smith, 1997). Leaders must also have a vision and be able to communicate that vision to everyone in the organization, build trust by remaining consistent, persistent and dependable and have a positive self regard and personal sense of growth (Grubbs, 1999).

There are also many qualities or traits identified through the research that help define true leaders. J. Craig Honaman (2003), principal in H & H Consulting Partners of Atlanta, Georgia identified courage, passion and creativity as desired traits of modern leaders. George Manning and Kent Curtis (1988) added to this list charisma and enthusiasm, ability, stability, vitality, self-confidence and concern.

When looking at volunteer organizations and programs Flora MacLeod (1993) identifies a number of elements that their leaders are responsible for providing while guiding organizations toward their appointed goals. These elements include initiating action, managing change, building teams, making decisions, solving problems, planning, supervising, delegating and motivating volunteers.

Responders attending the National Fire Academy seemed to agree with the recommendations of academia when answering a national poll of EMS workers. This poll identified 4 leadership traits they felt were required of their leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century field of Emergency Services; honesty, consistency, vision and competency (Dyer, 2000).

Finally, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani (2002) states a true leader must teach themselves first. They must study, learn and read independently to enhance their knowledge of any and all subjects that are foreign or new and study great past leaders and learn from their leadership.

Research Question 2. There are a number of nationally recognized volunteer organizations that provide leadership training to their volunteers. Table I shows the results of the Internet search to determine which organizations do and do not provide leadership training.

**TABLE I**

Leadership Training Programs  
in  
Volunteer Organizations

ORGANIZATION	LEADERSHIP TRAINING	WEBSITE
American Red Cross	Yes 2/6/03	corpsweb.redcross.org/learning/index.htm
Boy Scouts of America	Yes 2/19/03	www.scouting.org/boyscouts/resources/18-813/index.html
Civil Air Patrol	Yes 4/19/03	www.capnhq.gov/nhq/aeroed/AE_web_Page/SeniorTrainingnew.htm
Elks USA	No 4/12/03	www.elks.org/default.cfm
Explorer Scouts	Yes 4/12/03	www.scoutbase.org.uk/6to25/explorer/youngleader/factsheets.htm
Girl Scouts of America	Yes 2/7/03	www.girlscouts.org
Knights of Columbus	No 4/13/03	www.kofc.org/index_eng.cfm
Kiwanis International	Yes 4/12/03	www.kiwanis.org/about_kiwanis.html
Lions Club-Leo Club	Yes 4/13/03	www.lionsclubs.org/EN/content/youth_leo_devleader.shtml
Moose International	No 4/13/03	www.mooseintl.org/index.htm
Rotary International	Yes 2/6/03	www.rotary.org/leadership/index.html
Salvation Army	No 3/5/03	www1.salvationarmy.org
The Shrine of North America	No 4/10/03	www.shrinershq.org
United Way of America	No 4/10/03	national.unitedway.org/aboutuwa
Volunteer Center of United Way	Yes 2/6/03	www.volcenterwest.org/leaders.html

Of the 15 volunteer organizations identified in this research, 9 or 60% of the organization recognize that leadership training is important in developing their cadre of volunteers. These

organizations provide some level of leadership training for volunteers that can be found on their web sites listed in Table I.

Research Question 3. There are 4 counties that are adjacent to Westchester County that have primarily an all volunteer fire service with the exception of a few departments that are combination fire departments. The results of the survey found in Appendix B, *Regional County Leadership Survey* sent to the County Fire Coordinators of Putnam, Rockland, Dutchess, Orange and Westchester (Training Officer) counties are displayed in Table II and are the basis for answering Research Question #3.

**TABLE II**                      **Regional County Leadership Survey (Appendix B)**

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do you believe “Leadership” skills are important for Chief Officers in Volunteer Fire Departments?	5	0
Do you feel “Leadership” training should be required to assume a Chief Officer position in your Volunteer Departments?	5	0
Are there any current requirements for Chief Officers in volunteer departments to attend formal “Leadership” training prior to being elected/appointed to their position?	1	4
Do you believe the current volunteers in your county would support a mandatory Leadership program for members wishing to become future Chief Officers?	4	1
	<b>MANAGERS</b>	<b>LEADERS</b>
You currently view the majority of Chief Officers in the Volunteer Departments in you county as:	4	1

**TABLE III** LEADERSHIP SURVEY

(Appendix A Part A)

QUESTION	TRUE	FALSE	% CORRECT
1(F)	144	156	48
2(F)	96	204	68
3(F)	204	96	32
4(F)	90	210	70

Source: (Ward, 2001)

Research Question 4. The results of the survey in Appendix A, Parts A & B, are displayed in Tables III & IV and are the basis for answering Research Question #4.

Part A of the survey in Appendix A titled *Leadership Survey* asked four questions that referred to common myths that surround leadership (Ward, 2001). The results are found in Table III. These results show that of the four questions asked only one, on average, was answered correctly by a minimum of 70% of the respondents (passing grade is assumed to be a 70%). On average this represents a 75% failure rate as a whole for all respondents. The question that did receive a passing grade did so with exactly 70% of the respondents answering correctly.

The results of the second part of the *Leadership Survey* in Appendix A, Part B, used to answer Research Question 4 are found in Table IV. The questions asked (Smith, 1997) required the responder to determine if the activity was one performed by a Manager or a Leader. Here, when looking at the overall results it is determined that 64% of the responders, on average, failed to be able to select the activity and correctly match it to the proper category.

Taking both of these parts into consideration the respondents had a 66% failure rate in being able to identify activities, skills and traits related to leadership.

**TABLE IV**

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b><u>LEADERSHIP</u></b>	<b><u>SURVEY</u></b>	<b>% CORRECT</b>
	<b>(Appendix A MANAGER</b>	<b>Part B) LEADER</b>	
1(M)	288	12	96
2(M)	234	66	78
3(L)	144	156	52
4(M)	66	234	22
5(L)	264	48	16
6(L)	96	204	68
7(L)	114	186	62
8(M)	90	210	30
9(M)	108	192	36
10(L)	48	252	84
11(M)	180	120	60
12(L)	72	218	72
13(L)	210	90	30
14(M)	258	42	86

Source: (Smith, 1997)

Research Question 5 The results of the survey in Appendix A, *Leadership Survey*,

Parts C & D and E are found in Table V and are the basis for answering Research Question #5.

**TABLE V****LEADERSHIP SURVEY**

	<b>Part C &amp; D</b>		<b>Part E</b>	
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>MANAGER</b>	<b>LEADER</b>
1	294	6	114	234
2	288	12		

Questions in Part C & D in Appendix A asked if leadership skills and training are important for Chief Officers in Volunteer Fire Departments and should they be required. Of the

300 responding to the survey 97% felt these were necessary for their Chief Officers to possess. Part E of this survey wanted to know how the responders to the survey viewed their current Chief Officers; as Managers or Leaders. Some of the respondents answered that they saw them as both. Chief Officers in volunteer departments in Westchester County were viewed by 67% of the responders as leaders (234 out of 348).

## **DISCUSSION**

The researcher was able to perform research to answer the research questions as stated in the project. In answering the questions the researcher discovered sufficient information to make recommendations on the need for volunteer fire departments in Westchester County, New York to instill leadership skills and traits in their members in order to cultivate 21<sup>st</sup> century Chief Officers.

The researcher first set out to discover what professionals in academia, as well as the fire services, describe as skills and traits necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders in order to answer research question number one. Through evaluative research the researcher discovered an extensive set of skills and traits that are common to all of today's true leaders. Gregory P. Smith (1997) named his leadership skill set, that today's business environment requires, "Leadership Beatitudes". These beatitudes state that a leader must be bold and challenge the status quo, be a role model to his/her troops, authentic, approachable and a risk taker. The researcher feels it is imperative that in today's fire service, volunteer leaders need to adhere to these skill sets in order to keep the interest of the group. Too many volunteer fire departments in this country are finding it harder and harder to keep good volunteers and a great deal of this failure can be traced to the fact that there are no true leaders out front showing the way by challenging the status quo and

taking risks. It is much easier to follow tradition and not rock the boat. Today's volunteers want to be challenged and this takes a truly unique leader.

Smith (1997) also states that leaders must trust their employees to do the right thing. To do this they must be mentors and teachers to those they command imparting to them the knowledge that they have amassed over the years. But leaders, according to Gregory Smith, must also know what is essential to the task at hand and the success of the organization. The researcher believes that this knowledge must be shared throughout the organization, as does Mr. Smith, so everyone can help "steer the ship" in the right direction to meeting the organizational goals and mission.

Typically leaders look at and become familiar with trends that surround them then adjust the organization to these trends. They have a sense of purpose, a clear mission and can make others see this mission and the organizations vision. Leaders establish values which guide the behavior of the organization. They create systems which allow people to move toward the successful realization of the organizations mission and goals. Finally, they motivate others around them to help the organization be all it can be (Vineyard & McCurley, 2001).

"The next generation of Leaders will be those who can build a vision based on awareness of economic transformation, then help their partners and staff fulfill that vision. Leaders have to draw on a wide range of skills to get to the top and stay there", states author Esther Wachs (Wynn, 2001, p. 19). While this statement appears to speak of the business world, an area the fire service never compared themselves to, I believe the fire service must now adhere to these skill sets in order to survive. I agree with J.R. Grubbs (1999) following assessment of basic leadership skills that contribute to the kind of leadership described earlier by Esther Wachs:



- A leader must have a vision and must be able to communicate this vision to everyone in the organization
- A leader must build trust by remaining consistent, persistent and dependable
- A leader must have a positive self-regard and personal sense of growth

The skills mentioned are but a few that academia recognize as needed of today's leaders. There are many additional leadership qualities that scholars refer to such as courage, passion and creativity (Honaman, 2003). George Manning and Kent Curtis (1988) add to the growing list of qualities, skills and traits needed by today's leaders adding; ability, charisma and enthusiasm, stability, self-confidence, vitality and concern for the welfare of subordinates. Finally, Dr. Harry Carter (2003, p. 128) says that all good leaders are great listeners. "The absolute best leader is the one with the talent for listening. They search out people and talk to them to learn what makes them click".

Looking at volunteer organizations in general there are a number of elements of leadership that occur in all of these organizations, even in the volunteer fire service. These elements; initiating action, managing change, team building, decision making, problem solving, planning, supervising, delegating and motivating define the volunteer organization and are the responsibility of its leaders (MacLeod, 1993). Without possessing the skills, traits and qualities of a modern leader as described prior, I believe it is impossible for a volunteer Fire Chief to enact these necessary elements of leadership in order for his or her organization to succeed.

There are some of the same points of view about leadership expressed by those in the Emergency Services arena as in academia. Jeff Dyar (2000), EMS Program Chair at the National Fire Academy, stated that in a national survey of attendees at the NFA four traits were identified as necessary for today's leaders; honesty, consistency, vision and competency.

Bill Manning, a long time writer for Fire Engineering states, “We (the fire service) still cling to the Old World belief that leadership is a birthright, that we ascend to positions of leadership and prominence through some genetic predisposition. We also cling to the erroneous belief that leadership comes with a title or rank” (1999, p. 4). Manning goes on to say that a promotion and a badge do not make a leader. This view is backed up by 24-year fire service veteran Richard Gasaway (2003, p.14) when he states, “Contrary to what some would like to believe, a helmet with a different color doesn’t automatically make someone competent. Competency must be developed”. He continues by stating, “Oftentimes in the volunteer fire service, officers assume positions (through elections or appointments) they are not qualified to hold. Very few volunteer departments have a plan for officer succession or formal training programs for those who aspire to be officers”. The researcher see this as a real problem in the Volunteer fire service Westchester County. There are many “10-year wonders” that assume the Fire Chief position by election but have not acquired any of the skills, traits or qualities that have been mentioned as necessary for today’s leaders. It is the researchers contention that without any required formal standards for leadership training, prior to assuming the role of Fire Chief in a volunteer department, this lack of true leadership will continue to hamper the progress of the volunteer fire service in Westchester County New York.

The researcher, in answering research question number two, did find a number of national volunteer organizations that have instituted leadership training for their volunteers. This training is aimed at preparing them to assume leadership roles within their organization. In Table I in the Results section, 9 of 15 (60%) of the volunteer organizations identified do provide some type of leadership training to their members. This fact seems to back up what has been identified through the Literature Review that there are many leadership skills, traits and qualities

organizations must expose their members to in order to prepare them for future leadership roles. The volunteer fire service in Westchester County, up to now, has chosen to ignore this national trend within volunteer organizations and continues with the tradition of not requiring any type of Leadership training for their Chief Officers. The researcher sees this as a “tradition” that must end if we expect to improve the volunteer fire service in Westchester County and mirror the changing business environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Fire Service today, even the volunteer contingent, is a business. The researcher believes that if the volunteers departments do not start to use qualified trained leaders to run their organizations like a business they will shortly find themselves going the way of the dinosaurs of old.

The lack of requiring formal leadership training for Chief Officers is not limited to Westchester County in this region of New York. A survey taken to answer research question number three found that of the 5 counties in the lower Hudson Valley that surround Westchester, including Westchester, all believe that leadership skills are important and training in such should be required. However, only one of the counties, Rockland, has instituted such a mandatory training program but 4 out of the 5 stated that they believe volunteers in their county would be receptive to such a mandate. Finally, this survey shows that the Chief Officers in 4 out of 5 of the counties are viewed as Managers as opposed to Leaders of their departments. Again, the researcher views this as a trend that must be reversed throughout the volunteer fire service in the New York area and the country.

To answer the stated problem in this project, traditional technical training for firefighters in Westchester County, New York is insufficient to prepare them to assume Chief Officer roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service, the researcher needed to determine if the volunteer firefighters in Westchester understood the difference between a manager and a leader within their organization.

The results of a Leadership Survey, Part A & B (Appendix A), are found in Tables III & IV and answer research question number four. Overall, 66% of responders failed the combined two part question section of the survey aimed at determining if they truly knew the difference between managers and leaders in their organizations. It is obvious to the researcher, by reviewing the results of the survey, that the volunteer firefighters surveyed did not understand what skills, traits and qualities relate to managers vs. leaders in an organization. This only reinforces the researchers' belief in the need to require formal Leadership training for Volunteer Chief Officers.

The second part of the Leadership Survey, Parts C&D and E (Appendix A), answered research question number five. When you look at the results of research question number four, the lack of a complete understanding of what skills, traits and qualities relate to managers vs. leaders in an organization has a direct affect on the results in Table V, Part E. While 67% of the responders saw their Chief Officers as leaders rather than managers, the researcher directly relates this finding to the fact volunteer firefighters do not understand the difference between what it take to be a manager vs. a leader. This is substantiated in the 66% failure rate in question four. Naturally, the respondents to the survey viewed their Chief Officers as leaders since they saw most of the qualities of a manager as those of a leader. The Literature Review used to answer research question one clearly describes the skills, traits and qualities needed by today's leaders. However, without a clear understanding of these requirements the responders obviously were not prepared to make the distinction between leadership and management skills. The researcher expected to see the results in Tables III & IV prior to distributing the Leadership Survey in Appendix A since most, if not all, of the respondents to the survey have never been exposed to formal Leadership training within their organization.

There is a common myth widely held that leaders are born. However, there is no such thing as a born leader. Leadership can't be taught but it can be learned (Staley, 1999). This fact is supported in a book by Harvard Professor John Kotter (1996) entitled Leading Change where he states that leadership potential is not developed overnight but in fact these complex set of skills evolve over decades of learning and observing other leaders. Professor Kotter refers to this concept as "Lifelong Learning". New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani (2002) agrees with Professor Kotter as he states throughout his book, Leadership that a true leader must first teach themselves if they wish to become successful. They must study, learn and read independently to enhance their knowledge of any and all subjects that are foreign or new. Leaders, according to Mayor Giuliani, must also study great past leaders and learn from their leadership. This, according to the former mayor, can be accomplished by acquiring a mentor, someone you look up to and see as an effective leader, and learn from them and prepare yourself to assume a leadership role in your organization when the opportunity presents itself. The researcher believes this self-taught theory is only valid if the opportunities are present and the notion of leadership is encouraged and revered throughout the organization. Only then can someone learn to be a leader.

President Harry S. Truman once said, "Leadership is the ability to get other people to do what they don't want, and like it" (Smith, 1997, p. 77). Leadership is a complex amalgamation of qualities that makes a person powerful enough to cause the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts (Staley, 1999). If you want to become a truly effective leader you must proactively work to arm yourself with the weapons of modern leadership (Carter, 2003). It is the researchers' belief that these statements accurately reflect the essence of this entire project. Many concepts have been presented and indeed they are complex and expansive. However, if they are not understood and encouraged in the volunteer fire service in Westchester County volunteer fire

departments will continue to tread water. For without a rudder (leaders) to steer the ship (organization) it will surely go in circles and not achieve its stated mission.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Throughout this report the leadership skills, traits and qualities required of today's organizational leaders have been identified by both academia and emergency services experts. The need to provide formal leadership training to Chief Officers in volunteer fire departments answers the stated problem of this project; traditional technical training for firefighters in Westchester County, New York is insufficient to prepare them to assume Chief Officer roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fire service. However, the volunteer fire departments throughout Westchester County have not recognized the need to require the formal training in these skills for their current or future Chief Officers.

The results of research question four has shown, through a Leadership Survey, that current volunteer firefighters and officers do not understand the difference in the skills, traits and qualities required of managers vs. leaders. However, the same survey has determined that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 97%, do feel that formal leadership training for Chief Officers is important and should be required. This importance of and need to provide formal leadership training to volunteer Chief Officers is also identified by the four surrounding counties that border Westchester in New York through a separate survey. Finally, this project has identified a number of nationally recognized Volunteer organizations that currently understand the need for and provide leadership training to its volunteers.

Therefore it is this researchers recommendation that the volunteer fire departments in Westchester County immediately implement a formal requirement to have all current Chief Officers attend a New York State sponsored leadership training program to be held at the

Westchester County Training Center on an ongoing basis. It is also the recommendation of this researcher that all future firefighters be required to attend this same training prior to becoming eligible to assume a Chief Officer position within their respective organization. This should be a graduated implementation program so no department is unduly affected and time is provided for all who desire to attend this training to do so. The researcher also understands that due to current New York State laws regarding Home Rule that this can not be mandated from outside the organization. It is the responsibility of each and every volunteer fire department in Westchester County to come to an agreement, if possible, to make this a countywide mandate by incorporating it into their official departmental by-laws.

Delaying this recommendation, in the researchers' opinion, will only reinforce the current philosophy within the volunteer fire service in Westchester County that what has been the traditional method of paying your dues and rising through the ranks to the Chief Officer position is sufficient for 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders. This project has shown that not only is that incorrect but that most volunteers feel it must change for future Chief Officers.

Future readers of this report should review its recommendations and findings and expand on them to determine if their organizations could benefit from the finding within. Leadership programs that currently exist within and outside the fire service should be studied to determine if they provide the proper training needed for future Chief Officers. If not, then new programs need to be developed that will address the leadership skills, traits and qualities that future Chief Officers must possess to guide their departments towards their assigned organizational goals. A thorough review of the current Chief Officer requirements, or lack thereof, within their own volunteer fire organizations should drive the need for these programs in the future.

Finally, the findings of this report should not be limited to volunteer fire departments. Career department can and should benefit from these findings. This must only be the starting point from which all fire department look within and determine if they are truly preparing their future leaders to assume Chief Officer positions within their departments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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*LEADERSHIP SURVEY*

## TO ALL PARTICIPANTS:

This survey is part of an applied research project being done as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) at the National Fire Academy. I would like you to take a few minutes and answer the following questions about Leadership in the Volunteer Fire Service in Westchester County. Please be honest with your answers and no names or department information will be collected.

Thanks you for assisting in this survey. Please return your completed copy to your instructor when you are finished.

*Patrick T. Kelly*

Commissioner Patrick Kelly  
Emergency Services

**PART A:** Circle the correct answer

Source: (ward, 2001)

- |   |      |       |
|---|------|-------|
| 1. Leadership and Management are one and the same           | True | False |
| 2. Leaders are born, not made                               | True | False |
| 3. Management is an application of basic supervisory skills | True | False |
| 4. Effective managers must befriend their people            | True | False |

**PART B:** Check as either a Management or a Leadership function

Source: (Smith, 1997)

**Management****Leadership**

1. Carries out planning and budgeting
2. Oversees organizing and staffing
3. Charts a course providing direction
4. Follows rules & regulations
5. Motivates and inspires
6. Provides guidance and counsel
7. Trains and teaches
8. Follows orders
9. Maintains control and order
10. Encourages people to follow their example
11. Protects status quo
12. Builds relationships and trust
13. Questions rules and regulations
14. Writes memorandums

**PART C:** Do you believe “Leadership” skills are important for Chief Officers in Volunteer Fire Departments?      Yes      No

**PART D:** Do you feel “Leadership” training should be required to assume a Chief Officer position in your Department?

Yes      No

**PART E:** Do you see your Department’s Chief Officers as:

Managers

Leaders

## APPENDIX B

### *Regional County Leadership Survey*

Fellow County Fire Coordinators,

I am completing my Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) at the National Fire Academy and as part of the process I must complete an applied research paper on the topic of Leadership. I am doing my paper on the need for required “Leadership Training” as a prerequisite to becoming a Chief Officer in a volunteer department in Westchester County, NY. I am requesting that you take a moment to answer these few questions as they relate to your county. After you have completed the survey I would appreciate it if you would email me your response.

I want to thank you in advance for assisting me in this project.

Respectfully,

*Patrick T. Kelly*

Patrick Kelly  
Fire Coordinator  
Westchester County, NY.

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you believe “Leadership” skills are important for Chief Officers in Volunteer Fire Departments?

Yes      No

Do you feel “Leadership” training should be required to assume a Chief Officer position in your Volunteer Departments?

Yes      No

Are there any current requirements for Chief Officers in volunteer departments to attend formal “Leadership” training prior to being elected/appointed to their position?

Yes      No

Do you believe the current volunteers in your county would support a mandatory Leadership program for members wishing to become future Chief Officers?

Yes      No

You currently view the majority of Chief Officers in the Volunteer Departments in you county as:

Managers      or      Leaders